

Press Release

HARFORD COUNTY GOVERNMENT Office of Economic Development



PUBLIC SAFETY

"Ensuring a Safe
Harford"

EDUCATION

"Preparing Now,
Building for the Future"

EFFICIENCY IN GOVERNMENT

"Governing Smarter"

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

"Growing and Sustaining
Harford's Prosperity"

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

"Protecting Our
Environment"

QUALITY LIVING

"Safeguarding What is
Important to Harford
County Citizens"

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Visit Harford! Inc. opens Info Desk at MD House Travel Plaza

(Bel Air, MD) - - Local tourism leaders gathered at the Maryland House Travel Plaza on Thursday, May 29, 2014 to announce the formation of *Visit Harford!* Inc. It's a new not for profit 501c6 organization dedicated to the promotion of Harford County to visitors.

"Harford County has so much to offer for visitors," remarked County Executive David R. Craig. "The new 'Visit Harford' organization, through its partnership with the reconstructed Maryland House Travel Plaza, will introduce the county to millions of visitors each year, who otherwise might not have known about the many attractions available just a short drive away."

A local information desk opened as the first initiative of the new organization through a partnership with Areas USA, operators of the Travel Plaza. With more than 200,000 visitors a month at the Maryland House, *Visit Harford!* Provides a warm welcome. It's also a source for local information to encourage visitors to spend more time in Harford County or inspire a future trip.

Local officials made remarks at the event followed by a tour of the facility.

"We have the busiest travel plaza in the country in our own back yard," stated Jim Richardson, Director of Economic Development for Harford County. "I'd like to thank everyone at Areas USA for being a true community partner and providing this opportunity to promote the many assets of Harford County."

Areas USA re-opened the travel plaza in January of 2014 with new vendors, a modern design and a first of its kind public-private partnership in the State to operate the Travel Plaza.

"We want to make history in Maryland by not only providing the best products and customer service to our patrons, and by being equally as committed to being a

goodwill ambassador for the State of Maryland and the Harford County community,” stated Carlos de Jesus, Director of Operations for Areas, USA.

In partnership with the Harford County Office of Tourism, *the Tourism Advisory Board* and the Harford County Chamber of Commerce, *Visit Harford!* Inc. will offer new opportunities to local businesses to connect with more than 1.5 million visitors that come to Harford County annually. A Board of Directors has formed. It’s comprised of local tourism and hospitality industry representatives with plans to expand over the course of the year.

Other initiatives of *Visit Harford, Inc!* :

- A headquarters office and enhanced information center at the Chamber of Commerce to provide a greater linkage to the local business community.
- A group reservation and trip customization service. New software will provide the mechanism for groups to book lodging on the official tourism website, www.harfordmd.com, connecting local businesses and attractions with in-bound visitors. The service will enable visitors to access all the amenities available to them such as events, dining opportunities, etc. as they plan their arrivals in Harford County.
- An enhanced mobile website application will give visitors real-time access to local attractions, services, events and other amenities.

“Tourism is a sound investment. *Visit Harford!* Inc provides the vehicle to forge public-private partnerships that will maximize the investment and boost the economic return back to the County. We invite people to join our cause!” stated Patti Parker, Board President–Elect of *Visit Harford!*, Inc.

The goal of *Visit Harford!* Inc is to increase marketing and promotion of the industry generating greater economic return. The new organization will work with the County Tourism Manager and the Tourism Advisory Board to provide a funding vessel for enhanced tourism promotion enabling the ability to leverage investment from the business community for events and sponsorships.

Wini Roche, Harford County Tourism Manager, stated, “ *Visit Harford! Inc.* will enhance the connection between visitors, attractions, and local businesses. We are excited about promoting Harford County’s wonderful treasures to an expanded audience!”

According to Roche, the information desk at the Travel Plaza will take time to be fully operational with regular hours at the Maryland House until there is a team of volunteers that can be recruited and trained.

The goal is to have other project components set up by mid-summer including local information centers at the Chamber of Commerce and the Maryland House. A team of volunteer ambassadors will be an integral part of *Visit Harford! Inc.* programming. Anyone interested in participating or volunteering for *Visit Harford!* Inc should contact the Office of Tourism at 410- 638-3059.

“Preserving Harford’s past. Promoting Harford’s future.”